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NOTE ON WARD'S "PURE SOCIOLOGY." II.

ONE of the advising editors of this JOURNAL has called in question our plan of treating Dr. Ward's latest book. He thinks it should first have had a comprehensive review; its importance should have been distinctly pointed out; its place in the literature of the subject should have been indicated. After that it might have been in order to show, if possible, that it is not equally strong in all its details. If this judgment had been expressed before the other course had been adopted, it would certainly have led to reconsideration, though it does not seem likely that the reasons suggested for the alternative course would have prevailed.

There is too much in *Pure Sociology* to be passed upon profitably in a single review. A summary and an appreciation would certainly be the conventional way of paying a tribute to an author whom everybody likely to see such a notice already recognizes as *facile princeps* among American sociologists. Our correspondent has overlooked the fact that this JOURNAL contained a brief but very emphatic recognition of the importance of the book as soon as it appeared (Vol. VIII, p. 710). There is good reason to believe, moreover, that Dr. Ward hoped the book would be taken as laboratory material by American sociologists, and that discussion based upon it would both refine and fuse elements of truth now going to waste. In the beginning of the three historical chapters once intended to be parts of *Pure Sociology*, but finally published in this JOURNAL to keep the book from being too bulky, Dr. Ward charged part of the backwardness of sociology to everybody's egoism in exploiting his own notions, and nobody's willingness to thresh out the ideas of others (Vol. VII, p. 476). "When different writers shall begin to discuss one another's ideas," he said, "there will be some hope of an ultimate basis being found for agreement, however narrow that basis may be." This was a plain hint that a cross-examination of *Pure Sociology* would be welcome. The hint was repeated in the book itself in the passage referred to in our last number (Vol. IX, p. 404, citing *Pure Sociology*, pp. 12, 13). The suggestion seemed pertinent and timely. The unique position of Dr. Ward among American sociologists makes mere complimentary notice of his work, not only superfluous, but virtually trivial. His priority in time, and his advantage in scientific equipment, are so unquestioned that the

value of anything he writes must be taken for granted. The best way to get at the whole value is not to assume infallibility, but to apply more searching tests than would be advisable in the case of an author of less assured standing. In short, if there are any flaws in his book, they bear a very slight ratio to his whole sociological merit. As this is common fame among us, both he and his critics risk less when he is under discussion than if another man were put to the test. There is small danger-liability for him and a minimum of plausibility in suspicion of unworthy motive in them. In a word, he is subject to the penalties of his eminence. Not in a destructive spirit, but with a purely constructive purpose, we have planned to examine his work in detail. Such a discussion would not be worth while if the findings were all assumed in favor of the author in advance. He has expressed himself better than another can paraphrase him, and mere reiteration would be worse than useless. Not what he has said, but what remains to be said, is next in order. We think it more appreciative and respectful, therefore, to challenge the book, step by step, in a serious attempt to point out what it leaves to be desired, than to praise it as though it contained the conclusion of the whole matter.

The substance of *Pure Sociology* is in Parts II and III. Part I summarizes a wide range of prolegomena, and in so doing leaves many things in rather incomplete shape. This outline form of expression doubtless does injustice to the author's reserve thought. Our criticisms of this part of the work may suggest the poodle pestering the mastiff. We are discussing, however, the merits of the printed page, not of the author himself, and we are sure that assailable points even in these less important chapters afford subject-matter for profitable reflection.

The theorem of chap. iii reads: "The subject-matter of sociology is human *achievement*. It is not what men are, but what they do. It is not the structure, but the function" (p. 15).

The relations between this conception of sociology, and the dozen others previously enumerated are guarded in such a way that no good ground for objection appears; but accepting, for the sake of argument, the "achievement" conception of sociology, certain questions of emphasis at once arise. For example, the paragraph continues: "Sociologists are nearly all working in the department of social anatomy, when they should turn their attention to social physiology." The matter-of-factness in Ward's use of this idea affects me unfavorably. He appears to put too much stress on the purely mechanical associations of the term "function," and thereby to put himself out

of thorough consistency with his formula "achievement." That is to say, in his term "function" he seems to be conceiving of society as something in which individual choices have a smaller part to play than they really do. This to such an extent that one feels a measure of incongruity between his expressions in terms of "function" and those in terms of "achievement." This is the sort of thing which provokes the charge of "dualism." When process is conceived as mechanical and result as psychical, one feels that the interpretation does not interpret. No unity is established, no nexus appears. In trying to find one the questions urge themselves: Is this supposed mechanical function really psychical, or is the supposed psychical result really mechanical, or how else shall we conceive of the operation and the output as a whole?

This unfavorable impression is strengthened by such phrases as "that highest social science, social physiology" (*ibid.*). The use of terms is of course figurative, and no doubt the *tu quoque* answer is *prima facie* a legitimate bar upon my right to object. It is not to the figure, however, but to the amount of literalness in the figure that I demur. The figure strains too hard to go on all fours, and limps in doing it for the reason just stated.

The impression is confirmed again by the *obiter dictum* that "the spiritual part of civilization," which rests on utilization of nature, "does not need to be specially fostered," provided the soil is prepared for it in the shape of material prosperity (p. 18). This is partly optical illusion which overlooks the tremendous labors that men have always had to put forth to procure spiritual progress after the material means were supplied; and it is partly the same mistake in theory which marks the most vulnerable point in *Dynamic Sociology*. I have called it the drop-a-nickel-in-the-slot conception of the social process—the idea that "information" passes automatically through the steps of the psychological series and deposits "happiness" in its owner's cup. The amount of technical effort that has been expended on the spiritual contents of civilization, which Ward refers to as a spontaneous growth, is curiously underestimated in this passage. There is probably a close connection also between this appraisal of spiritual tasks and the enumeration of means by which men have reached the two chief classes of achievements, viz., "handling quantities" and "utilizing forces." Ward enumerates as such means: (1) military systems, (2) political systems, (3) juridical systems, (4) industrial systems (p. 30). Why scientific, educational, and religious systems

do not deserve a place in this schedule as means in some measure to both classes of ends, does not appear. Whatever our estimate of them otherwise, they certainly have been as distinct factors, for weal or woe, in fixing the course of civilization as either of the others.

Another of the humors which Ward's most appreciative friends occasionally detect in his work is the delicious lapse in the passage (pp. 37–41) from the strictly objective, non-valuing attitude that he prescribes for himself and for "pure sociology" in general (p. 4). He passes into edifying discourse, and points the faint-hearted and the suspicious to a way for sociology to escape pessimism when observing the "paltry littleness" of individual acts and motives. We must fix our gaze rather on the worthy and the grand in the sum total! Good and wholesome doctrine, but what has become of the severity of our "pure sociology" when it allows itself to be seduced into valuations at all ? !

At the close of this chapter Ward betrays doubt whether his "achievement" and the "origin and spontaneous development of society" actually cover each other. His instinct is evidently closer to the truth than his schematology.

Chap. iv, "Methodology," is not the sort of thing that is due from Ward under this title. It bears too plain marks of accommodation to the summer student. It wanders among side issues—style, pedagogy, vagaries of scientists, etc. (pp. 45, 46). There is discussion of the need of method, but no real contribution to method.

The most important methodological content in the chapter is its expansion of the proposition (p. 48): "*In the complex sciences the quality of exactness is only perceptible in their higher generalizations.*" This is said to be "a different thing from the truth that in the complex sciences safe conclusions can only be drawn from wide inductions" (*ibid.*). If it is a different thing, it becomes important to find out what it means, and then if it is true. To show what he means Ward cites the economists as in fault because they try to discover "truth of too low an order to be established in sociology" (p. 49). Explanation of the proper procedure starts with the formula: "The method of sociology is generalization" (p. 49). The proposition is correct, so far as it goes, but I am not satisfied with the author's explanation of its meaning. "The illusion of the near" (pp. 49, 50) is a happy phrase for an obvious fact, but its relation to logical generalization is hardly as cardinal as the argument at this point would make out. The special case exploited is good padding for a popular lecture, but it is emphasized unduly as an illustration, and fails as a substitute for

close analysis of generalization. Ward seems to put the whole stress upon one step of the generalizing process—*i. e.*, discovery of the working correlations of phenomena, as, for instance, in so locating our planet with reference to the other heavenly bodies that we have an explanation of the "milky way." He says relatively little about that higher generalizing process which results in subsuming many individual phenomena under a generic concept; the process by which we arrive, for example, at either of the more general notions with which his own book is concerned—"origin," "spontaneous," "development,' "society," "achievement," "sociology," "taxis," "genesis," "telesis," etc., etc. He of course has the proper place in his own thinking for this logical process, and he has it more or less clearly in view (*e. g.*, p. 55), but it does not get its share of attention in the argument.

In further expanding the idea of generalization Ward unconsciously presents an instance of standing so straight that one leans backward. Referring to the primary sociological conception that there is "law in history," and assuming that the task of sociology is to find out what the law is, he takes his stand on an unimpeachable proposition: "Sociology can only become a science when human events are recognized as phenomena" (p. 57). He then permits his suspicion that somebody else may force a narrow meaning upon the term "phenomena" to betray him into doing just that himself. He continues:

> When we say that they are due to the actions of men, there lurks in the word *actions* the ghost of the old doctrine of free-will. In other words, the old-fashioned doctrine of free-will assumes that men may act differently from what they do act, irrespective of character and environment (p. 57).

Thereupon he proceeds to substitute his own particular brand of determinism for the cruder preconception of phenomena. Logically considered, however, the one prejudice is just as impertinent as the other. Our data are the things that occur, or which the mind presents to itself as having occurred. This is all that the term "phenomena" in the first stage of criticism contains. When we begin scientific inquiry, the addition to the notion "existence" or "occurrence" is an empty, formal notion of causality. What has occurred, or is, has had its being for sufficient reasons of some sort or other. Of what sort, we do not claim to know in advance. The term "phenomena" stands for an object of inquiry at just this stage. Probably no logical category is less frequently abused than the one so designated. It is quite unnecessary, and needlessly obstructive and confusing, to make our fight against unwarranted assumptions over the shoulders of this term. Given

"phenomena," our task is to find out, if we can, what, how, and why they are. When, in the case of social phenomena, we state the task for short in terms of the *actions of men*, we do not thereby posit a theory of "free-will," or "determinism," or anything else, any more than we posit a theory of the metaphysics of matter when we state a topographical problem in terms of geologic action. When we say that the surface phenomena of the earth are due to "geologic action," our proposition is essentially not declarative, but interrogative. It is merely an inverted form of expressing a problem of surface-building forces. We have put in the indicative mode the statement of the question to be investigated. In other words, we have merely boiled down the proposition: "We must now find out what the geologic forces are, and how they act in this case." In like manner, when we say that historic or contemporary events are forms of human actions, we are merely indicating our problem, viz.: "What, and how, and why are human actions?"

It is hard to see how a purist in scientific method can overlook the absurdity of calling for an attitude toward social phenomena that either begs the question or proves to be meaningless altogether. "The scientific view is that human events are phenomena of the same general character as other phenomena" (p. 57). Turning Ward's own form of expression upon himself, I would say there lurks in this way of putting it the ghost of the old doctrine of materialism. Flying from the ghost of free-will into the arms of the ghost of materialism may be natural, but it is neither dignified nor convincing. This phrase "same general character" is surely not less ambiguous than the innocent phrase "the actions of men." If we mean that there is some sort of regular nexus between human events, just as there is between all other occurrences, whether we have a clue to it or not, we are well within the limits of safety. If we mean that the nexus between antecedent and consequent in human events is the same as between other occurrences, we are simply substituting a dogma for the apparent pointings of the evidence. If a human choice is not generically different from a physiological or a chemical phenomenon, it is at least specifically so different from either that no physiology or chemistry in sight can begin to account for it. Moreover, when Ward goes on to speak of the "subtle psychic causes" that "so largely produce" human events (p. 57), he shows that, according to his own standard of practice, the previous spook-hunting passage was merely a diversion in hypercriticism.

In the further course of his argument Ward next works out some rather popular illustrations of what a "law" is in human actions. My *caveat* here is that it would be well if we could pension off our decrepit habit of confusing statements of *process* which we have not explained, with the conception of *law* understood as explanation of the process. But passing this, Ward posits the *law of parsimony* as the fundamental law of everything psychic. "Here we have a law as exact as any in physics or astronomy" (p. 59).

One is, of course, a bit puzzled over this confident assurance, if one chances to recall the author's other dicta: wastefulness is the "method of nature in general" (p. 68, *cf.* p. 88); and again, "We not only discover one great law of evolution applicable to all the fields covered by the several sciences of the series"—*i. e.*, the whole range of science—"but we can learn something more about the true method of evolution by observing how it takes place in each of these fields" (p. 71). Stranger paradoxes may have been explained away, but one's confidence in a guide who offers to show the way through the mysteries of physical and psychical phenomena is a good deal shaken by this apparent facing in opposite directions. We feel like demanding at the outset an understanding, after the fashion of the English premier, of whom tradition says that he once delayed adjournment of a cabinet meeting by standing with his back to the door, and holding off his colleagues with the ultimatum: "First, gentlemen, which lie do we agree to?" Before we abandon our base we should like to know whether we are to assume that social evolution is a thing by itself or a part of general evolution; and, if the latter, whether we are to understand that its law is parsimony or wastefulness. Removal of this slight discrepancy would elucidate the argument.

But to pry into this "law of parsimony," a little. It is unfortunate that Ward simply leaves us with a phrase for this most exact of formulas—a sort of unknown god which we must for the present ignorantly worship—when he might have revealed the law itself. He says it means "a rational being will always seek the greatest gain" (p. 59), but that does not always mean pecuniary gain (p. 60). Then he illustrates the action of the "law" in the case of "creating a class of paupers or mendicants by simply letting it be known that food or alms will be given to those who ask. All considerations of pride or self-respect will give way to the imperious law of the greatest gain for the least effort" (p. 61). I must submit that I do not yet get on the track of the "law." That a man who would rather eat cold victuals than work

will quit work if he can be idle and still get the cold victuals I know by cumulative evidence, but I am unable to raise this knowledge to the rank of a "law," fundamental to everything psychic. My difficulties are not lessened when I am told that this "law" is "the basis of scientific economics" (p. 59); for a few pages earlier I read:

> the failure of the old-time political economy, which established an "economic man" impelled simply by physical want. This failure was due in part to the fact that there never was such a being, and in part to the fact that the laborer gradually rose in the social and psychic scale until his physical impulses became a less important factor than his social and psychic impulses, for which their formulas were worthless (p. 48).

This confession that the most considerable attempt ever made to justify the "law of parsimony" has shown it to be worthless, coupled with the above undaunted assertion that it is "a law as exact as any in physics or astronomy," is a close second to the reply of the Irish lawyer: "Your Honor, if the court overrules this point, I have several others āqually conclusive."

All I can see in the "law" is that no man tries to do anything which, all things considered, he does not choose to do; or that nobody exerts himself without a purpose, and that no one puts into his exertion more effort than he feels to be worth while. But precisely this subjective element, the personal equation, is the part of the formula that upsets all its exactness, and that contains the whole problem of sentient action. It so happens that the most of what we want to do or be is ulterior to the immediate means that we must employ, and the more highly developed a man is, the more complex and remote are some parts of the ends for which he works. It is impossible to reduce those ends to any concrete measure. The "law of parsimony" therefore proves to be exact only when it becomes an identical proposition, viz., "No man will exert more effort than he exerts;" or else it is the vicious circle, viz., "A man always does what he thinks will produce the greatest good, because the thing that he thinks will produce the greatest good is what he does." The moment we put any real measure of action into the predicate, however, the formula becomes susceptible of several interpretations, each of them so elastic that no approach to exactness remains. For instance, I am just graduating from college. I have an independent income. I can choose between being a gentleman of leisure, entering the medical, legal or engineering profession, engaging in business, or devoting myself to politics. If this law of parsimony is exact, as Ward claims, it should indicate which course I shall choose, as the line of least resistance, or at least it should furnish

an equation that would show how to calculate my line of choice. In fact, all that it can do is to wait till I have made my choice, and then say: "He did that because he thought it would get him the greatest good." This is merely saying: "He did it because he did it."

But the troubles of this "exact" law do not end here. Suppose I have a classmate in precisely the same circumstances. He considers the same possibilities and chooses the same occupation. It turns out in half a dozen years that one of us has worked conspicuously harder than the other. Why? The reasons may be either purely in ourselves or in the different specific relations in which the end chosen may appear to us individually, or in a combination of the two variants. In either case, what becomes of the exactness of the "law of parsimony," unless we reduce it to the identical proposition? The law of gravitation is popularly supposed to be exact. For ordinary purposes it means "what goes up must come down," or what is up must go down if support fails. The formulas of falling bodies give us the more precise contents of the law. If the "law of parsimony" can be made to mean anything that both has a content, and at the same time can be compared with the law of gravitation in exactness, Dr. Ward could write his name forever by the side of Newton's by showing it.

Some minds may be put to rest by assertions that psychic facts are phenomena just like physical facts, and that they may be reduced to laws as exact as physical laws. We have nevertheless not yet eliminated from the world the embarrassing fact that men do every day "make the worse appear the better reason." So long as this continues to be the case any mechanical formula of human actions must be taken in a Pickwickian sense.

As I intimated above, these criticisms touch merely upon relatively trifling externalities. They relate to marginal matters, and do not reach the substance of this altogether remarkable book. I do not hesitate to pronounce it one of the rare books which will assert a permanent place in the history of knowledge. It seems to me, however, that one or more of the things which I am pointing out will probably catch the attention of types of people already prejudiced more than enough against sociology. They will be glad to find in them further pretexts for pleading the baby act, instead of thinking the sociological argument through to the end. The structure that Dr. Ward has built is not to be confounded with the staging which he used in the building. We shall come later to the essential value of the work.

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